RUPERT C. BARNEBY
(October 6, 1911–December 5, 2000)
A MEMOIR

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"Dear Rich: Thanks so much for your letter of July 13, for the good news in it, and for the little loco from near St. George, Utah, which brought a special joy (your no. 3182). I feel sure that you have run it correctly to *A. musimonum*—it's simply not possible to squeeze a flower so short, a calyx so distinctly campanulate, into *A. amphioxys*. ... What gives me a particular boot about your plants is this: in 1942 I collected on limestone in Mokiak Pass s of St. George an astragalus at the time only in young flower which seemed to me almost certainly *A. musimonum*. ... This collection (my no. 4321) was cited provisionally in the protolog ... , but later I was never able to locate the material for comparison. ... [Y]ou can imagine the satisfaction that your collection brings to me, the loss of my own having stuck in my mind like a splinter in the foot, healed over but still and always a cryptic nag" (Aug. 2, 1973). I received an essay, essentially, about a single collection we had made in Mokiak Pass on a circuitous return from a collecting trip with two graduate students to Death Valley. The collection was not particularly significant, but still one that elicited a letter so gratifying to a young botanist, a letter that simultaneously provided a confirmation on identification of a little-known species from a world's expert on this immense genus and provided images of Rupert Barneby and Dwight Ripley three decades earlier, during a great world war, isolated in southwestern Utah sniffing out locoweeds and other marvelous flora in a very open West. As do others, I treasure my letters and memories from Rupert, always so positive with regard to the material at hand, so encouraging, and so expressive. The specimens were "run," of course, in his at-that-time recently published "Atlas of North American *Astragalus*" (1964).

Rupert Barneby was born on October 6, 1911, at Trewyn, Monmouthshire, a 17th century house in England nearly on the Wales border. He died at 89 years old at 5:10 PM, Tuesday, December 5, 2000, at the Jewish Home for the Aged in New York, where he resided subsequent to a mild stroke a few months earlier. Until the stroke, he was in his office nearly every day, continuing to work with his botany, at the last "primarily identifying the gazillions of specimens sent to him for det." (Jackie Kallunki). The world has lost a tremendous botanical taxonomist and grand human being.

SIDA 19(3): 745 – 751. 2001

Early in his childhood Rupert was fascinated with plants and insects and fossils, and two aunts gave books to him that encouraged his interest. At 14 Rupert excelled in producing a herbarium collection in a local naturalist's club competition. Some of his identifications where challenged. Rupert knew he was right, and came to the realization that he had an independent intellect. Not only from books does one gain knowledge, but real learning could come from observing the natural world. In public school, at Harrow, at age 14, he met Dwight Ripley, two years older, who had a knowledge of plant scientific names. This deeply impressed Rupert, and from there a life-long friendship grew. Officials were scandalized, Rupert enjoyed telling, by the close relationship that developed, not so because of a schoolboy romance, but because Mr. Ripley was American. After boarding school Rupert went to Grenoble University in France, and to Cambridge (Trinity College), where he finished a B.A. in History and Modern Languages before he was 21. Mr. Ripley attended Oxford. While at university they went on joint plant-hunting trips to Spain, the Mediterranean, and northern Africa, bringing back plants to grow in the rock garden at the Ripley estate at Sussex, a garden that ultimately grew to contain 1138 species. As was the case for other great biologists of the past few centuries, Rupert's father resisted his study of botany; it was unsuitable for a young man. Suitable occupations were the army, navy, or church, or as they encouraged, a career in diplomacy. Rupert relates, "I was unsuitable for the army or navy and I hated the church. That's really why I came to America." Rupert was disinherited; Mr. Ripley's personal fortune paid the bills.

The relationship between Rupert Barneby and Dwight Ripley was expressed largely in the development and appreciation of their garden. In 1939 they published together a catalogue of the plants growing at their house, The Spinney, in Waldron, Sussex, England. *Carlina barnebiana* Burtt & P. H. Davis, a thistle from Crete, dates from this period of their explorations. Overnight guests at the Ripley/Barneby house might very well find a bud vase on their headboard placed by Rupert, with a small bouquet of plants in their families of interest, taken from the garden. After 50 years of sharing their enthusiasm for botany and the beauty of plants, Rupert lost his life-long friend; Mr. Ripley died of complications arising from alcoholism.

Rupert arrived in the United States in 1937, first living in Hollywood, later moving to New York. He established permanent residency in 1941. He and Ripley continued their plant hunting in the American West. In addition to collecting living plants for their rock garden, Rupert also prepared herbarium specimens, many of them representing undescribed taxa from that still poorly known region. Among his several newly made friends in western botany, Alice Eastwood and John Thomas Howell encouraged Rupert to publish his first new species in 1941, from Yucca Flat in Nevada, *Cymopterus ripleyi*. The article appeared in Leaflets of Western Botany, a journal that they supported financially for many

years. In the same issue Eastwood described *Castilleja barnebyana* in honor of her friend who had deposited many collections at CAS. From that beginning he, often with others, named more than 1160 plant taxa new to science (*Mimosa* 217; *Astragalus* 118; *Cassia* 112; *Senna* 98; *Dalea* 61; *Chamaecrista* 50; etc. [NYBG database]) in 147 publications. In all western states, plant taxonomists and conservationists deal with Barneby names daily. In New Mexico, for example, he authored 26 plant taxa (23 *Astragalus*), and made new combinations in names for 44 more (K. Allred, NMCR database). A search of Index Kewensis on CD-ROM in 1997 listed 2045 taxa with Rupert as publishing author. Many of the drawings in his publications are by his own hand.

Rupert arrived at the New York Botanical Garden in the early 1950's as a visiting scholar to consult the herbarium. He soon became an honorary curator in Western botany. In 1959 he was given an official position to help Howard Irwin proceed with his studies of *Cassia*. In 1989 he was named curator of systematic botany, the first and only paying job he ever held. He consulted for Brittonia, particularly to vet Latin descriptions for new taxa, and to critically read manuscripts. His special interests were xerophytic floras, taxonomy of the Leguminosae, Neotropical Menispermaceae. His extensive knowledge of the Fabaceae resulted in thousands of specimens being sent to him for determination. These gifts have pushed the legume collection at NYBG beyond 270,000 specimens.

Rupert's ability to discern differences and recall detail, and to deal with cards and sheets of notes in extensive files while working on a typewriter, was matched by his truly astounding ability to synthesize. "Rupert Barneby was a great student of plants in the style of George Bentham and the other encyclopedic workers of the nineteenth century, who would tirelessly analyze all we knew about enormous groups of plants and reduce that knowledge to lucid prose, working day after day, month after month, and year after year" (Peter Raven, as cited in The New York Times). So true; chatting over tea on one of my visits to NYBG I learned that he spent the best part of six months dealing with the variation and synonomy of *Lupinus argenteus* Pursh for the Intermountain Flora (Fabales, Vol. 3,B, 1989). His ability to organize and synthesize massive amounts of detail, unrelentingly moving great projects toward completion, have given us magnificent taxonomic syntheses of *Oxytropis* (1952), *Astragalus* (1964), *Cassia* (1977, 1978,) and *Cassiinae* (1982), *Dalea* and allied genera (1977), Mimosaceae (1996, 1998). Of his 147 botanical publications, 111 are in the Fabaceae. In all, they comprise more than 6,600 printed pages.

I am grateful to Stan Welsh for the following passage, from his Jan. 16, 2001, presentation at NYBG at Rupert's memorial service. It reflects upon Rupert's love of the West, of the field, of plants; on his humor, on his valued involvement with colleagues, and his view of himself relative to the "real" world. Writes Stan, "Field work was part of Rupert's Psyche. He spent a huge amount of time col-

lecting plants, becoming acquainted with them in nature. And, he had an almost mystical quality of being able to ferret out novelties over vast expanses of the American West. His field experiences were sometimes interrupted by real stupidities, as when he was accosted by police in Arkansas in 1963. 'A suspected murderer was known to be in flight, in a Jeep, and naturally anyone in an out of state Jeep [Rupert's favorite field vehicle] was it. It was a nasty experience being forced out of the car at gun point by a porcine state cop of the lowest (almost Hollywood) style—huge belly, flabby cheeks, cigar-butt clamped into a tiny red mouth—and then have all my possessions pawed over. Only botanists believe in anything so other-worldly as a botanist, and I do sort of sympathize with the Law faced by Linnaeus; one cannot fairly expect comprehension or sympathy.' The quote is from a letter to Isely (16 July 1965), and was in response to Duane's having been held in jail for some hours by Colorado police, him looking suspiciously like a bank robber. Botanists are a suspicious bunch."

Rupert understood and used Latin well, consulting for Brittionia and, upon request, helping those less skilled in the idiom to prepare proper descriptions and diagnoses. He could also be relied upon to provide opinions on the use of Latin in botany. For example, in New Mexico a number of us were preparing a review of plant species of conservation concern in the state, and we encountered a specific epithet spelled in two ways in the literature. Solution: ask Rupert — and we received: "Dear Rich: there's so much wrong with the epithet *mesa-verdae* that it would be best put on an index expurgatorius, but as we don't have a method for this it is best left exactly as originally written. Latinized Mesa Verde would be *mensa viridis*, giving a genitive *mensae-viridis*: simply putting a Latin genitive ending on one or both parts of the Spanish place name is not at all that same thing. If any tinkering were to [be] attempted it would be best to think of mesaverde as one word and make a genitive *mesaverdei*. In any case *mesae-verdae* is even more grotesque than the original monstrosity, which I would recommend you leave unaltered, as a warning to those who assume that they have mastered Chopin yet are at page one of Czerny's exercises" (14 March, 1988). I am so glad I asked.

The botanical community showed its appreciation for Rupert's magnificent contributions again and again by bestowing upon him prestigious awards. Rupert always struck me as a modest and unassuming individual, appreciative of the work of others, truly interested in their progress. Awards were not his cup of tea. In response during an interview regarding his receipt of the Millenium Botany Award at the International Botanical Congress in 1999, given for his lifetime of contribution to botany, he said, "I'm conscious of the prestige of the medallion, but hideously aware that it's an award for survival rather than for merit. It's part of the dismal cult of personality that started in Hollywood and now has infected the entire planet." Among other prestigious awards are the Distinguished Service Award, NYBG, 1965; the Henry Allan Gleason Award,

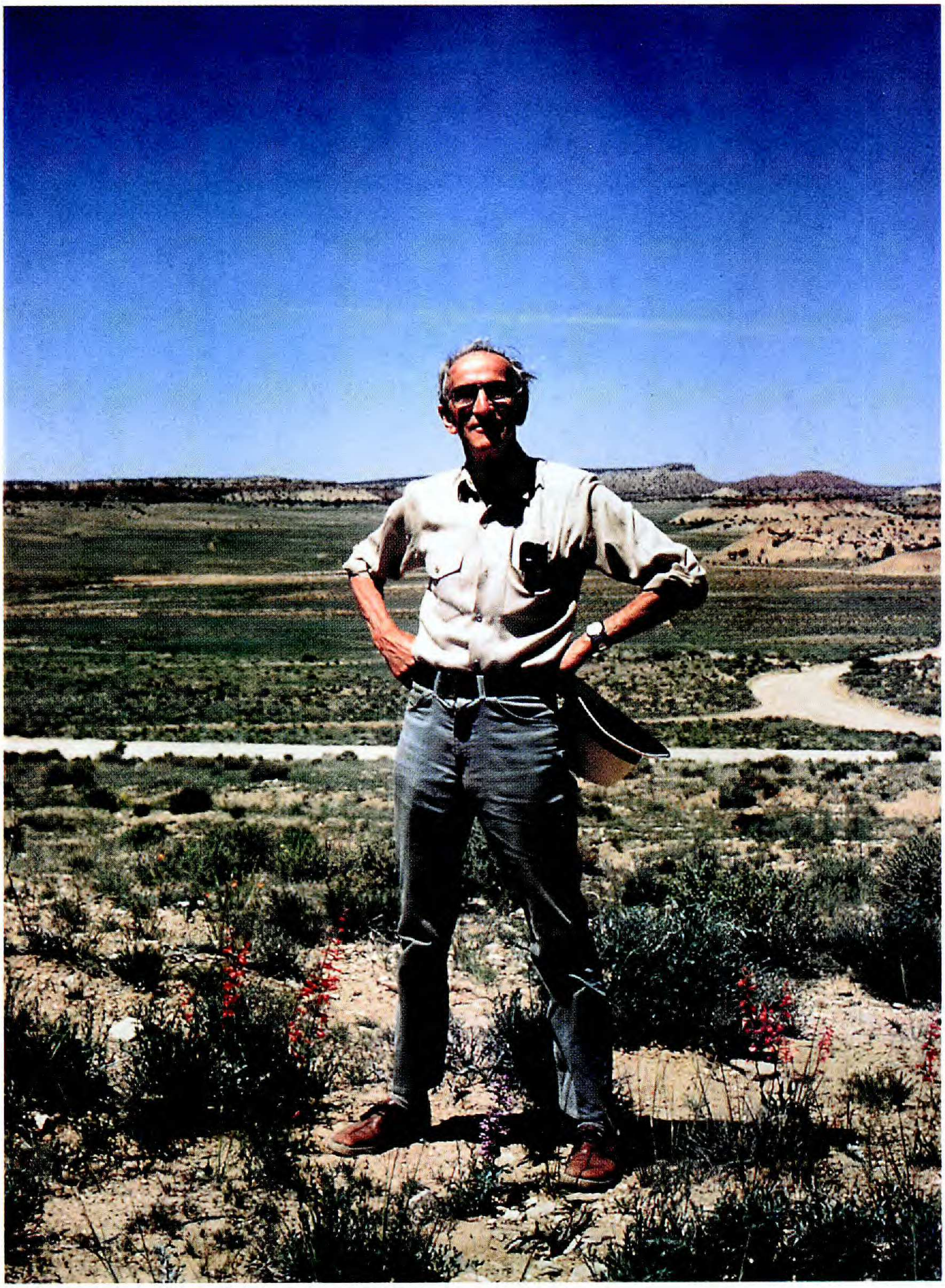
an annual award from NYBG for an outstanding recent publication in plant taxonomy, ecology, or geography, in1980; the Asa Gray Award, American Society of Plant Taxonomists, for his contribution to systematic botany, in 1989; and the Engler Silver Medal, International Association of Plant Taxonomists highest honor for publications, for his monographic work in *Mimosa*, in 1993. He also was awarded an honorary doctor degree in 1979 from The City University of New York. In 1991, NYBG established the Rupert C. Barneby Fund for Research in Legume Systematics, a fund that continues to support research in this large, important family.

Rupert was an unofficial mentor and valued colleague to many. Duane Isely spent a sabbatical period with him at NYBG. Many, among them, Jim Grimes, Melissa Luckow, and André de Carvalho, recently have credited him as an inspiration in their lives. Ghillean Prance shares that "he will be remembered by thousands of colleagues for his uncommon generosity in sharing his inexhaustible knowledge and precise editorial skills." Stan Welsh writes to me, "... [he] was a master of words, works, and wonders. ... I miss him already." Cronquist wrote (Brittonia 33:263. 1981), "Rupert is a gentleman and our resident classical scholar. If we need to know something about Latin, or Greek, or the niceties of English construction, we turn to him. He is kind, considerate, and learned. No polemicist, he can come up with the piquant *mot juste* when he chooses. We love him." The last speaks for so many. He had a delightful sense of humor, and loved a twist of the word. I often used a heading on my letters that involved a pun, "From the Herbarium, where. ..." In response I received a letter from Rupert, "From the New York Botanical Garden, where Brittonia waives the rules."

Volume 33 of Brittonia was dedicated to Rupert C. Barneby on the occasion of this 70th birthday, "in recognition of his devotion and intellectual commitment to plant systematics and his extraordinary depth and breadth of scholarship." In issue number three of that volume (33:263-274. 1981) is a series of letters from friends and colleagues from several nations. Each letter lauds his intellect, his accomplishments, and to a one, each expresses deep appreciation for the warmth of this extraordinary person. Joseph Kirkbride, who received his doctoral training at NYBG, brings back memories for many in one paragraph of his letter, "In his office, he had prepared a pot of tea and opened a package of biscuits. The tea was Jackson of Piccadilly, and the blend was 'Earl Grey's,' his favorite blend and brand of tea. That first 'tea time' was a marvelous experience. He put me at ease and kept the conversation going as he introduced himself. It is a landmark in my life." In a modern e-mail message to Pat Holmgren, Stan Welsh writes, "My trips to the garden were always highlighted by the morning and afternoon teas in his office." In my own trips to the Northeast, for professional reasons or otherwise, I would always make a special effort to arrive at Rupert's office to spend some time visiting with him over a cup of tea, each time a very special moment, the memories of which I now value so much.

In the same vein, in a communication from Noel Holmgren (Dec. 8, 2000), I learn that he also considers Rupert an important mentor in his development. He expressed what so many of us have felt in our interactions with Rupert. "There was no formal structure to the lessons, they were just part of relaxed, enjoyable conversation. He loved the same plants that I was becoming acquainted with. Each species of plant had a special character, be it the place it grew, its appearance, or its relationships to other species. He always gave the feeling that there was a spirit residing in each plant. You, Rich, have had these enlightening conversations with Rupert and so have so many others. So many, many others. I know this after years of being right across the hall from his office. In some ways his hearing loss was sometimes my gain. I could listen to his tea-time conversations with people, whenever I chose. His wonderful and suddenly explosive laughter. I'll really miss him." As will I, and so many others who Rupert so generously touched in his long and productive life.

Author's note.—A number of individuals responded enthusiastically and helpfully when I asked for information regarding Rupert Barneby's great life. Clearly he was extremely important to, and well-liked by, them. I know there are dozens of others who have had exchanges with Rupert that they would have been happy to share. I am particularly grateful to Pat Holmgren, who forwarded numerous very valuable sources of facts and perspectives on his private and professional life. Particularly helpful were New York Times, 10 Dec 2000, NYBG Herbarium Sheet #254, 15 Oct 1997, an NYBG press release, Dec 8, 2000, and Rupert Barneby's vitae.



Rupert Barneby, photo by Noel Holmgren, who writes (31 Jan 2001), "The photograph of Rupert was taken on May 30th, 1978. It was the last full day in the field with Rupert that year before he flew back to New York. I had been trying to get a candid photo of him daily for the preceding 10 days and I could never pull it off. I thought he would feel self conscious if he were aware of what I was trying to do, so finally, out of frustration I asked him to pose. I couldn't believe how natural and photogenic he was. The backdrop is on the San Rafael Swell in Emery County, Utah, south of Interstate Highway 70."